

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (original) A cheese processing apparatus comprising an elongate upright drainage column including inlet means adapted to charge the column with either cheese coagulum or detritused cheese to form a pillar of cheese therein and incorporating as a lower end outlet thereof means for detritusing the leading edge of the pillar of cheese as it descends from the column to remove a quantity of cheese and simultaneously form therefrom a quantity of particulate cheese and deposit such particulate cheese onto transporting means for feeding the quantity of particulate cheese to downstream processing means.

2. (original) A cheese processing apparatus as claimed in claim 1 wherein an effective seal is formed at the transition of the pillar of fused cheese to the detritusing means to substantially prevent air entering the pillar of fused cheese via the detritusing means and wherein the detritusing means deposits the particulate cheese into a sealed hopper and the transport means comprises an auger disposed in an outlet from the hopper.

3. (currently amended) A cheese processing apparatus as claimed in ~~either of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein salting means are incorporated into the inlet means of the tower to enable salted particulate cheese to be charged thereinto.

4. (currently amended) A cheese processing apparatus as claimed in ~~any one of the three preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein a secondary detritusing means is provided to receive and further particulate the quantity of particulate cheese prior to being deposited into the transport means.

5. (currently amended) A method of processing cheese milk into cheese comprising the substantially continuous steps of charging the column of an apparatus as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 with a quantity of coagulum, allowing sufficient residency time therein for the coagulum to fuse to form a pillar of cheese, allowing the pillar of cheese to descend the column to contact the detritising means and thereby removing cheese from the pillar and simultaneously forming a quantity of particulate cheese and depositing the quantity of particulate cheese into the transporting means.

6. (currently amended) A method of processing cheese milk into cheese utilising an apparatus as claimed in ~~any one of the claims 1-5~~ claim 1 inclusive to include the step of charging a quantity of particulate cheese into the column then allowing sufficient residency time therein for the particulate cheese to fuse to form a pillar of cheese, allowing the pillar of cheese to descend the column to contact the detritising means and thereby removing cheese from the pillar and simultaneously forming a further quantity of particulate cheese and depositing that quantity of particulate cheese into the transporting means.

7. (currently amended) A method of processing cheese milk into cheese utilising at least two of the apparatus as claimed in ~~any one of the claims 1-5~~ claim 1 inclusive wherein the transporting means of a first of the apparatus is connected to an input of a second of the apparatus, ~~the first apparatus~~

~~being utilised to carry out the method defined in claim 5 and  
the second apparatus being utilised to carry out the step  
defined in claim 6.~~

8. (original) A method of processing cheese as claimed in claim 7 wherein the second apparatus includes salting means in the inlet thereto.

9. (cancelled)

10. (cancelled)